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ABSTRACT

This brief, based on a presentation by New York City Board of Education member Dr. Luis Reyes, describes the work and findings of the Latino Commission on Educational Reform, a special commission of the Board. In an effort to gather information for 1990-91 on Latino students in New York City schools, the Commission found that: Latino students account for different proportions of enrollment in each of the system's five boroughs; Latinos are segregated in schools whose students come from minority and low socioeconomic backgrounds; Latino students are likely to attend underachieving schools; 1 in 4 Latino ninth-graders did not complete high school 4 years later as of June 1991, showing a dropout rate that was 40 percent higher for Latinos than for all students; and by the time they arrive at high school the academic achievement of Latino students is already behind others. The greater part of this report consists of the recommendations of the five Committees of the Commission, which focused respectively on research and analysis of the Latino dropout crisis; curriculum and instruction; counseling and support services; parent and community empowerment; and factors affecting Latino students' achievement. A list of Commission members is included. (JB)

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Community Voices, Student Voices

Interim Report of the Latino Commission on Educational Reform

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INTRODUCTION

In October 1991, the New York City Board of Education formed the Latino Commission on Educational Reform to help the Board fulfill its commitment to Latino children, who comprise an increasing segment of the students in the public school system. (There are now more than 334,000, or 35 percent, Latino students in New York City schools.) Chaired by Board of Education member Dr. Luis Reyes, the Commission includes 35 Latino leaders representing community-based organizations, colleges and universities, government agencies, and students, parents, and teachers. Latino students from Fordham University also participated in the Commission process by interviewing Latino high school students for a report, *Student Voices*. The Commission is housed at the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Teachers College.

At least two important issues emerged during the Commission's first six months of operation that will require concentrated attention:

(1) the wide diversity of race, language, immigrant status, nationality, socioeconomic status, and generation in the U.S. within Latino communities; and

(2) inequities in school funding, which are particularly important for a community with one-half of its members living under the official poverty level.

Findings made thus far and recommendations based on the work of the five Commission committees follow.

FINDINGS

Reflecting their geographic concentration, Latino students account for different proportions of the total enrollment in each of the five boroughs. In 1990-91, they were a majority (54 percent) of the public school population in the Bronx, followed by Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.

Latino students are a majority of the student body in 11 of the 32 school districts in New York City — five in the Bronx, three in Manhattan, and three in Brooklyn.

Latinos are segregated in schools whose students come from minority and low socioeconomic backgrounds. About 40 percent of Latino students in New York State attend schools where more than 80 percent of the student body is of color. In virtually all of the predominantly Latino community school districts, more than one-half of the students receive income maintenance, and more than two-thirds of the students are eligible for free lunch.

Latino students are likely to attend underachieving schools. In ten of the eleven majority Latino community school districts, the proportion of students reading at or above grade level is below the citywide average of 47 percent. In seven of these eleven districts, fewer than two in five students read at or above grade level. Eight of these eleven districts score below the citywide average in mathematics (62.7 percent at or above grade level), and six of them score well below that, at under 55 percent.

One in four Latino ninth-graders did not complete high school four years later as of June 1991, showing a dropout rate that was 40 percent higher for Latinos than for all students. Compared to 19 percent of the Board's 1990 Cohort Dropout Study, 27 percent of Latino students had dropped out by the expected date of high school graduation. While only 32 percent of high school students were Latino, 41 percent of the dropouts were Latino.

This Brief is based on a presentation made by Dr. Luis Reyes at the Summer 1992 *Teachers College Urban Education Conference*, organized by the Institute for Urban and Minority Education.

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Of the 124 public high schools in New York City, 23 high schools — which are likely to be poor and overcrowded — have a student enrollment of more than 50 percent Latino students. Of these schools, 19 have free lunch eligibility rates higher than 35 percent. More than one-half are intensely overcrowded (over 125 percent building utilization rate), making them twice as likely to be overcrowded as those 23 high schools with Latino enrollments of less than 12 percent.

By the time they arrive in high school, the academic achievement of Latino students is far behind others. Although data on high school mathematics achievement were not available, high school reading scores indicate that the disadvantaged situation of majority Latino public schools continues through middle school and into high school. About one-half of the 23 majority Latino high schools had fewer than 40 percent of their students reading at or above grade level. These 23 high schools were twice as likely to be at this low level as were the 23 high schools with the smallest concentrations of Latino students.

Latino students are severely underrepresented in the four specialized academic high schools whose dropout rates are among the lowest citywide. Latino students represent only 4 percent of the enrollment at Stuyvesant High School, 9 percent at the Bronx High School of Math and Science, 15 percent at Brooklyn Technical High School, and 21 percent at Fiorello La Guardia High School — all of which are well below the 32 percent citywide high school Latino population average.

As a result of teacher distribution based on seniority and credentials in the New York City schools, personnel resources are sorely lacking in many predominantly Latino districts. There are two main causes for this unequal distribution: (1) the inter-district variation of average teacher salaries; and (2) the use of a service-cost allocation based on teacher salaries.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE COMMITTEES OF THE COMMISSION

Committee on Research and Analysis Of The Latino Dropout Crisis

After considering issues related to students and dropout prevention programs, the Board of Education's allocation of resources for these programs, and structural obstacles to collaboration between community-based organizations and schools, the Commission recommends that the Board of Education:

- Institutionalize an annual process of surveying students, bringing out their voices, and eliciting feedback on the planning, design, development, and evaluation of school and dropout prevention initiatives, as well as on general curricula.
- Report measures of Latino student success which are tied to issues of economic security and occupational opportunity. Furthermore, the Board must set specific annual goals that target improved performance outcomes for Latino students in problem areas, such as dropout reduction and mastery/achievement in mathematics and science.
- Seek new and creative funding methods in contract awards that target dropout prevention initiatives for Latino students. To facilitate utilization of community programs, the Board should introduce legislative initiatives in the New York State Assembly to ensure categorical funding streams that will create multi-year funding patterns for community-based organizations.

The *Student Voices* research project to elicit Latino students' views has shown that students "know the deal": when they are getting a good education, and when they are not. They also have good ideas on how to improve their education. The project concludes that, in the case of Latino dropouts, schools do make a difference. *Student Voices* recommendations include:

- Schools with high Latino dropout rates must address the issues raised by students that concern the lack of support and encouragement they perceive is given to Latino students. All schools should encourage Latino students to apply to a variety of public and private four-year colleges.
- All high schools should introduce cross-cultural studies as a requirement to bridge the gap between the different ethnic and racial groups in the school. Schools should take seriously the teaching of Latino cultures, and not just celebrate multiculturalism in the abstract.
- High schools should develop bilingual night programs open to both parents and students wherein they can improve their work skills.
- The Board of Education should adopt, as a premise for future policy, that Latino students do *not* want to drop out.
- The Board should conduct further research to explore why the experience of many Limited English Proficient (LEP) students is more positive than that of non-LEP Latino students, and what the relationship of racial climates is to the success of Latino students.

Committee on Curriculum and Instruction

This committee examined several areas related to curriculum and instruction where new local initiatives could create culturally appropriate models of academic success for Latinos. The following four proposals also address the means through which students can be prepared for life in a democratic society: leadership development, community service, and social action.

- A system-wide Latino Educational Reform Initiative is needed to stimulate development of model programs focused on curtailing the well-documented academic failure and dropout rates of Latino students. It should promote instructional practices, governance structures, and extracurricular activities that benefit Latino students. With monies from private and public sources, the schools that apply would receive first planning and then implementation grants.
- A small open-enrollment Latino Leadership High School of 700 seventh- and twelfth-graders should be created, based on the ASPIRA model. It would serve as a model for the education of Latino students and for the effective implementation of curricula that facilitate multi-ethnic understanding. The school would have three goals: (1) to provide a rigorous academic program to prepare *all* students for college; (2) to create a model of professional practice around educational issues relevant to the success of Latino students; and (3) to become a focal point of involvement for the larger Latino community in school reform efforts.
- A Bilingual/Multicultural Institute designed as a university-public school collaborative focused on the professional development of bilingual teachers and administrators should be established. Furthermore, the Board should provide a salary differential for teachers with bilingual skills to attract and retain well-qualified candidates to the bilingual teaching profession.
- To address the underachievement of Latino students in mathematics, all Board math initiatives should target Latino students, whether Limited English Proficient or not.

Committee on Counseling and Support Services

Counseling and support services are key in addressing the equity issues that adversely affect Latino students. The committee has a vision of the school counselor as student advocate linking all services to meet the needs of Latino students and their families. Major counseling recommendations are these:

- Increase the ratio of counselors, especially bilingual counselors, to the number of students they serve.
- Increase the number of bilingual counselors for early childhood to provide early intervention and to increase parent involvement.
- Resolve equitably the mandated needs for counseling in special education and the needs for bilingual counselors and counseling services for Latino students in general education.
- Improve linkages with community-based organizations, including a revision of the contracting process.
- Enhance the role of the counselor so that all counselors can become student advocates, share their expertise in multicultural perspectives, and participate in ongoing staff development.
- Monitor the implementation of school guidance plans.
- Create a Migration Orientation Program and a Migration Resource Center to meet the needs of newly-arrived Latino students.

Committee on Parent and Community Empowerment

This committee focused on parent involvement from two perspectives: participation in school governance, and involvement in improving the quality of education. The committee also looked at the mechanisms available in the public school system to facilitate the participation of parents, community residents, students, and community-based organizations. Lastly, the committee considered the Board's contracting and procurement practices as they relate to Latino contractors. The Commission recommends that the Board and Chancellor:

- Establish a special community school board elections unit to educate parents, to train potential candidates, and to monitor the conduct of the Board of Elections.
- Prepare and implement procedures to maximize parent voter registration, education, and turnout.
- Require from the Chancellor an independent yearly evaluation of the state of Latino parent involvement in governance, including data analysis, quality of participation, and parent surveys.
- Reestablish the position of Bilingual Community Liaison in every school and district with more than 25 percent Latino enrollment.
- Charge the Office of Monitoring and School Improvement and the Office of Community District Affairs with enforcing the provisions of the revised Parents' Blue Book.
- Provide public reporting on adult education data by race and ethnicity, program, and borough, on an annual basis.
- Develop a plan with specific utilization targets of minority and women-owned companies throughout the Board's procurement system.
- Develop and implement a mechanism for identifying Latino and other minority/women-owned vendors of color.
- Assign purchasing agents to increase the number of Latino and other minority/women-owned vendors on the eligibility lists.

Committee on Factors Affecting Latino Students' Achievement

This committee thought about the needs of Latino children and their families in a holistic way, considering the conditions of their lives in New York City. Therefore, it chose five broad sets of issues on which to concentrate: (1) school/community relations, (2) school/work linkages, (3) self-esteem, (4) intergroup relations, and (5) security. The Commission recommends that:

- The Board extend resources for the development of community schools in majority Latino school districts.
- Schools serve LEP and English proficient students together in a two-way bilingual enrichment model that values the languages and incorporates the cultural backgrounds of all participants.
- Schools incorporate activities into instruction that teach students success by encouraging them to solve problems in the context of "real-world" activities.
- Schools train students in strategies for resolving intergroup conflicts without violence, including analysis of problems, peer mediation, and cultural understanding.
- Schools and districts train School Safety Officers in cultural and linguistic diversity issues along with child and adolescent development.
- The Board mandate that each school report, on a semi-annual basis, when, how, and by whom the building has been used for community-related functions. Each district must report what public and/or private funds have been sought to provide activities for youth.

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